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SUBJECT: POLISH MFA: CONTINUE DIALOGUE WITH BELARUS AFTER  
DISAPPOINTING ELECTIONS

REF: WARSAW 01074

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. A Polish MFA official told us that the GOP agrees with the U.S. and OSCE assessment that the September 28 parliamentary elections in Belarus were neither free nor fair. The MFA saw some "minor improvements" in the election process and will seek to continue a dialogue with Belarus on issues such as freedom of the media and the fate of the Polish Union in Belarus. The official conceded, however, that now is not the time to relax EU sanctions or to lift the EU visa ban on designated Belarusian officials. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Polish MFA Deputy Director for Eastern Policy (and former Polish Ambassador to Belarus) Mateusz Maszkiewicz told us on September 30 that Poland's position on the Belarusian parliamentary election conformed with that of the United States and the OSCE. Despite some minor improvements, the elections were "not free, not fair, and not democratic." Maszkiewicz lamented that Lukashenka had failed to capitalize on a golden opportunity to improve his image in the West.

#### Theories of Panic Ballot Stuffing and Russian Intrigues

¶3. (SBU) Maszkiewicz said the Polish Embassy in Minsk had heard from unspecified Belarusian authorities that local election officials realized on the afternoon of September 28 that they were not going to have enough votes to reach the 50 percent threshold level required to validate the election results. In a panic, they allegedly proceeded to increase the number of ballots in favor of Lukashenka's candidates. Maszkiewicz said the Embassy had also heard rumors from other sources in Belarus that Russian intelligence organizations rigged the results of the election in order to isolate Lukashenka from the West.

#### Lukashenka Running Out of Options

¶4. (SBU) Maszkiewicz told us that Lukashenka will probably continue to look to the West as a means to counterbalance Moscow in an attempt to maintain at least some independence. Lukashenka's options, according to Maszkiewicz, are quickly narrowing. Lukashenka has failed in his efforts to interest China and Iran in investing in or deepening economic relations with Belarus. A once promising relationship with Venezuela is also on the decline because Chavez has shifted his focus to Moscow.

¶5. (SBU) Maszkiewicz speculated that Russia will probably gain some concessions from Minsk when Prime Minister Putin visits Belarus in early October. According to Maszkiewicz, Belarus and Russia will probably agree to a joint air space command, despite the fact that Lukashenka sees it as a threat to his authority. Regarding Georgia, Maszkiewicz indicated that Lukashenka has little room to maneuver on the recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and will probably

cave in to Moscow's demands.

#### Poland's Stance After Belarusian Elections: Continue the Dialogue

16. (SBU) Maszkiewicz indicated that Poland will continue its dialogue with Belarus -- including mid-level government officials, members of the opposition, and civil society groups -- although it will be difficult to provide the GoB meaningful incentives for change in light of the election results. He added that it is important to build strong democratic institutions in Belarus that will outlast the current presidency. As a result, Poland is seeking instruments to push ahead with such an agenda.

17. (SBU) In the near term, Poland will focus on resolving the status of the Polish Union in Belarus and easing Belarusian restrictions on the media. Maszkiewicz emphatically denied recent press reports that the MFA is seeking to remove Andrzelika Borys -- with whom Maszkiewicz has a personal relationship -- from the leadership of the Polish Union in Belarus. Maszkiewicz said that he would not allow such a plan to go forward. Instead, the MFA is seeking to get the Union's two splinter groups -- one of which is backed by the Belarusian government -- to find ways to work together. Maszkiewicz complained that Prime Minister Donald Tusk was too quick to meet with Borys after the media claimed the MFA was seeking to oust her, making it appear that the government indeed had doubted her.

18. (SBU) Maszkiewicz said Poland plans to "start a dialogue" with Lukashenka to convince him to ease restrictions on the activities of the media. Maszkiewicz said that it would be a

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good sign if Lukashenka were to cancel the recently enacted media law as a concession to the West. If unsuccessful, Maszkiewicz said, Poland will continue plans to "cover Belarus with satellite and radio programming."

19. (SBU) COMMENT: Maszkiewicz's remarks generally echoed the sentiments of the Polish press, think tanks, and other government officials that the results of the election were generally disappointing, but not surprising. As a result of the election, the Polish MFA appears to have abandoned its hope of softening the EU visa ban, at least in the short term. However, MFA officials and the press pointed out that a few minor improvements had been made in the Belarusian elections--particularly in restraining police persecution of political opponents--which they see as a sign that Lukashenka might be willing to bend on some issues.

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